

THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF TWO
LECTURES TO POPULAR AUDIENCES

- I. REST
II. THE NATURE OF THE SELF

BY

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I

REST

To some, in the present whirlpool of life and affairs it may seem almost an absurdity to talk about Rest. For long enough now rest has seemed a thing far off and unattainable. With the posts knocking at our doors ten or twelve times a day, with telegrams arriving every hour, and the telephone bell constantly ringing; with motors rushing wildly about the streets, and aeroplanes whizzing overhead, with work speeded up in every direction, and the drive in the workshops becoming more intolerable every day; with the pace of the walkers and the pace of the talkers from hour to hour insanely increasing—what room, it may well be asked, is there for Rest? And now the results and issues of war, redoubling the urgency of all questions, are with us.

The problem is obviously a serious one. So urgent is it that I think one may safely say the amount of insanity due to the pressure of daily life is increasing; nursing-homes have sprung up for the special purpose of treating such cases; and doctors are starting special courses of tuition in the art—now becoming very important—of systematically doing nothing! And yet it is difficult to see the outcome of it all. The clock of what is called Progress is not easily turned backward. We should not very readily agree nowadays to the abolition of telegrams or to a regulation compelling express trains to stop at every station! We can't *all* go to Nursing Homes, or afford to enjoy a winter's rest-cure in Egypt. And, if not, is the speeding-up process to go on indefinitely, incapable of being checked, and destined ultimately to land civilisation in the mad-house?

It is, I say, a serious and an urgent problem. And it is, I think, forcing a certain answer on us—which I will now endeavour to explain.

4 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

If we cannot turn back and reverse this fatal onrush of modern life (and it is evident that we cannot do so in any very brief time—though of course ultimately we might succeed) then I think there are clearly only two alternatives left—either to go forward to general dislocation and madness, or—to learn to rest even in the very midst of the hurry and the scurry.

To explain what I mean, let me use an illustration. The typhoons and cyclones of the China Seas are some of the most formidable storms that ships can encounter. Their paths in the past have been strewn with wrecks and disaster. But now with increased knowledge much of their danger has been averted. It is known that they are *circular* in character, and that though the wind on their outskirts often reaches a speed of 100 miles an hour, in the centre of the storm there is a space of complete calm—not a calm of the *sea* certainly, but a complete absence of wind. The skilled navigator, if he cannot escape the storm, steers right into the heart of it, and rests there. Even in the midst of the clatter he finds a place of quiet where he can trim his sails and adjust his future course. He knows too from his position in what direction at every point around him the wind is moving and where it will strike him when at last his ship emerges from the charmed circle.

Is it not possible, we may ask, that in the very midst of the cyclone of daily life we may find a similar resting-place? If we can, our case is by no means hopeless. If we cannot, then indeed there is danger.

Looking back in History we seem to see that in old times people took life much more leisurely than they do now. The elder generations gave more scope in their customs and their religions for contentment and peace of mind. We associate a certain quietism and passivity with the thought of the Eastern peoples. But as civilisation traveled Westward external activity and the pace of life increased—less and less time was left for meditation and repose—till with the rise of Western Europe and America, the dominant note of life seems to have simply become one of feverish and ceaseless activity—of activity merely for the sake of activity, without any clear idea of its own purpose or object.

Such a prospect does not at first seem very hopeful; but on second thoughts we see that we are not forced to draw any very pessimistic conclusion from it. The direction of human evolution need not remain always the same. The movement, in fact, of civilisation from East to West has now clearly com-

pleted itself. The globe has been circled, and we cannot go any *farther* to the West without coming round to the East again. It is a commonplace to say that our psychology, our philosophy and our religious sense are already taking on an Eastern colour ; nor is it difficult to imagine that with the end of the present dispensation a new era may perfectly naturally arrive in which the St. Vitus' dance of money-making and ambition will cease to be the chief end of existence.

In the history of nations as in the history of individuals there are periods when the formative ideals of life (through some hidden influence) change ; and the mode of life and evolution in consequence changes also. I remember when I was a boy wishing—like many other boys—to go to sea. I wanted to join the Navy. It was not, I am sure, that I was so very anxious to defend my country. No, there was a much simpler and more prosaic motive than that. The ships of those days with their complex rigging suggested a perfect paradise of *climbing*, and I know that it was the thought of *that* which influenced me. To be able to climb indefinitely among those ropes and spars ! How delightful ! Of course I knew perfectly well that I should not always have free access to the rigging ; but then—some day, no doubt, I should be an Admiral, and who then could prevent me ? I remember seeing myself in my mind's eye, with cocked hat on my head and spy-glass under my arm, roaming at my own sweet will up aloft, regardless of the remonstrances which might reach me from below ! Such was my childish ideal. But a time came—needless to say—when I conceived a different idea of the object of life.

It is said that John Tyndall, whose lectures on Science were so much sought after in their time, being on one occasion in New York was accosted after his discourse by a very successful American business man, who urged him to devote his scientific knowledge and ability to commercial pursuits, promising that if he did so, he, Tyndall, would easily make "a big pile." Tyndall very calmly replied, "Well, I myself thought of that once, but I soon abandoned the idea, having come to the conclusion that I had *no time to waste in making money.*" The man of dollars nearly sank into the ground. Such a conception of life had never entered his head before. But to Tyndall no doubt it was obvious that if he chained himself to the commercial ideal all the joy and glory of his days would be gone.

We sometimes hear of the awful doom of some of the Russian convicts in the quarries and mines of Siberia, who are (or were)

6 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

chained permanently to their wheelbarrows. It is difficult to imagine a more dreadful fate: the despair, the disgust, the deadly loathing of the accursed thing from which there is no escape day or night—which is the companion not only of the prisoner's work but of his hours of rest—with which he has to sleep, to feed, to take his recreation if he has any, and to fulfil all the offices of nature. Could anything be more crushing? And yet, and yet . . . is it not true that we, most of us, in our various ways are chained to our wheelbarrows—is it not too often true that to these beggarly things we have for the most part chained *ourselves*?

Let me be understood. Of course we all have (or ought to have) our work to do. We have our living to get, our families to support, our trade, our art, our profession to pursue. In that sense no doubt we are tied; but I take it that these things are like the wheelbarrow which a man uses while he is at work. It may irk him at times, but he sticks to it with a good heart, and with a certain joy because it is the instrument of a noble purpose. That is all right. But to be chained to it, not to be able to leave it when the work of the day is done—that is indeed an ignoble slavery. I would say, then, take care that even with these things, these necessary arts of life, you preserve your independence, that even if to some degree they may confine your body they do not enslave your mind.

For it is the freedom of the mind which counts. We are all no doubt caught in the toils of the earth-life. One man is largely dominated by sensual indulgence, another by ambition, another by the pursuit of money. Well, these things are all right in themselves. Without the pleasures of the senses we should be dull mokes indeed; without ambition much of the zest and enterprise of life would be gone; gold, in the present order of affairs, is a very useful servant. These things are right enough—but to be *chained* to them, to be unable to think of anything else—what a fate! The subject reminds one of a not uncommon spectacle. It is a glorious day; the sun is bright, small white clouds float in the transparent blue—a day when you linger perforce on the road to enjoy the scene. But suddenly here comes a man painfully running all hot and dusty and mopping his head, and with no eye, clearly, for anything around him. What is the matter? He is absorbed by one idea. He is running to catch a train! And one cannot help wondering what *exceedingly* important business it must be for which all this glory and beauty is sacrificed, and passed by as if it did not exist.

Further we must remember that in our foolishness we very commonly chain ourselves, not only to things like sense-pleasures and ambitions which are on the edge, so to speak, of being vices ; but also to other things which are accounted virtues, and which as far as I can see are just as bad, if we once become enslaved to them. I have known people who were so exceedingly 'spiritual' and 'good' that one really felt quite depressed in their company ; I have known others whose sense of duty, dear things, was so strong that they seemed quite unable to *rest*, or even to allow their friends to rest ; and I have wondered whether, after all, worriting about one's duty might not be as bad—as deteriorating to oneself, as distressing to one's friends—as sinning a good solid sin. No, in this respect virtues *may* be no better than vices ; and to be chained to a wheelbarrow made of alabaster in no way preferable to being chained to one of wood. To sacrifice the immortal freedom of the mind in order to become a prey to self-regarding cares and anxieties, self-estimating virtues and vices, self-chaining duties and indulgences, is a mistake. And I warn you, it is quite useless. For the destiny of Freedom is ultimately upon every one, and if refusing it for a time you heap your life persistently upon one object—however blameless in itself that object may be—Beware ! For one day—and when you least expect it—the gods will send a thunderbolt upon you. One day the thing for which you have toiled and spent laborious days and sleepless nights will lie broken before you—your reputation will be ruined, your ambition will be dashed, your savings of years will be lost—and for the moment you will be inclined to think that your life has been in vain. But presently you will wake up and find that something quite different has happened. You will find that the thunderbolt which you thought was your ruin has been your salvation—that it has broken the chain which bound you to your wheelbarrow, and that you are free !

I think you will now see what I mean by Rest. Rest is the loosing of the chains which bind us to the whirligig of the world ; it is the passing into the centre of the Cyclone ; it is the Stilling of Thought. For (with regard to this last) it is Thought, it is the Attachment of the *Mind*, which binds us to outer things. The outer things themselves are all right. It is only through our thoughts that they make slaves of us.

8 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

Obtain power over your thoughts and you are free. You can then use the outer things or dismiss them at your pleasure.

There is nothing new of course in all this. It has been known for ages; and is part of the ancient philosophy of the world.

In the Katha Upanishad you will find these words (Max Müller's translation): "As rainwater that has fallen on a mountain ridge runs down on all sides, thus does he who sees a difference between qualities run after them on all sides." This is the figure of the man who does *not* rest. And it is a powerful likeness. The thunder shower descends on the mountain top; torrents of water pour down the crags in every direction. Imagine the state of mind of a man—however thirsty he may be—who endeavors to pursue and intercept all these streams!

But then the Upanishad goes on: "As pure water poured into pure water remains the same, thus, O Gautama, is the Self of a thinker who knows." What a perfect image of rest! Imagine a cistern before you with transparent glass sides and filled with pure water. And then imagine some one comes with a phial, also of pure water, and pours the contents gently into the cistern. What will happen? Almost nothing. The pure water will glide into the pure water—"remaining the same." There will be no dislocation, no discoloration (as might happen if *muddy* water were poured in); there will be only perfect harmony.

I imagine here that the meaning is something like this. The cistern is the great Reservoir of the Universe which contains the pure and perfect Spirit of all life. Each one of us, and every mortal creature, represents a drop from that reservoir—a drop indeed which is also pure and perfect (though the phial in which it is contained may not always be so). When we, each of us, descend into the world and meet the great Ocean of Life which dwells there behind all mortal forms, it is like the little phial being poured into the great reservoir. If the tiny canful which is our selves is pure and unsoiled, then when it meets the world it will blend with the Spirit which informs the world perfectly harmoniously, without distress or dislocation. It will pass through and be at one with it. How can one describe such a state of affairs? You will have the key to every person that you meet, because indeed you are conscious that the real essence of that person is the same as your own. You will have the solution of every event which happens. For every event is (and is felt to be) the touch of the great

Spirit on yours. Can any description of Rest be more perfect than that? Pure water poured into pure water. . . . There is no need to hurry, for everything will come in its good time. There is no need to leave your place, for all you desire is close at hand.

Here is another verse (from the Vagasaneyi-Samhita Upanishad) embodying the same idea: "And he who beholds all beings in the Self, and the Self in all beings, he never turns away from It. When, to a man who understands, the Self has become all things, what sorrow, what trouble, can there be to him—having once beheld that Unity?"—What trouble, what sorrow, indeed, when the universe has become transparent with the presences of all we love, held firm in the One enfolding Presence?

But it will be said: "Our minds are *not* pure and transparent. More often they are muddy and soiled—soiled, if not in their real essence, yet by reason of the mortal phial in which they are contained." And that alas! is true. If you pour a phial of muddy water into that reservoir which we described—what will you see? You will see a queer and ugly cloud formed. And to how many of us, in our dealings with the world, does life take on just such a form—of a queer and ugly cloud?

Now not so very long after those Upanishads were written there lived in China that great Teacher, Lao-tze; and he too had considered these things. And he wrote—in the Tao-Teh-King—"Who is there who can make muddy water clear?" The question sounds like a conundrum. For a moment one hesitates to answer it. Lao-tze, however, has an answer ready. He says: "But if you *leave it alone* it will become clear of itself." That muddy water of the mind, muddied by all the foolish little thoughts which like a sediment infest it—but if you leave it alone it will become clear of itself. Sometimes walking along the common road after a shower you have seen pools of water lying here and there, dirty and unsightly with the mud stirred up by the hooves of men and animals. And then returning some hours afterwards along the same road—in the evening and after the cessation of traffic—you have looked again, and lo! each pool has cleared itself to a perfect calm, and has become a lovely mirror reflecting the trees and the clouds and the sunset and the stars.

So this mirror of the mind. Leave it alone. Let the ugly sediment of tiresome thoughts and anxieties, and of fussing

10 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

over one's self-importances and duties, settle down—and presently you will look on it, and see something there which you never knew or imagined before—something more beautiful than you ever yet beheld—a reflection of the real and eternal world such is only given to the mind that rests.

Do not recklessly spill the waters of your mind in this direction and in that, lest you become like a spring lost and dissipated in the desert.

But draw them together into a little compass, and hold them still, so still;

And let them become clear, so clear—so limpid, so mirror-like;

At last the mountains and the sky shall glass themselves in peaceful beauty,

And the antelope shall descend to drink, and the lion to quench his thirst,

And Love himself shall come and bend over, and catch his own likeness in you.¹

Yes, there is this priceless thing within us, but hoofing along the roads in the mud we fail to find it; there is this region of calm, but the cyclone of the world raging around guards us from entering it. Perhaps it is best so—best that the access to it should not be made too easy. One day, some time ago, in the course of conversation with Rabindranath Tagore in London, I asked him what impressed him most in visiting the great city. He said, "The restless incessant movement of everybody." I said, "Yes, they seem as if they were all rushing about looking for something." He replied, "It is because each person does not know of the great treasure he has within himself."

How then are we to reach this treasure and make it our own? How are we to attain to this Stilling of the Mind, which is the secret of all power and possession? The thing is difficult, no doubt; yet as I tried to show at the outset of this discourse, we Moderns *must* reach it; we have got to attain to it—for the penalty of failure is and must be widespread Madness.

The power to still the mind—to be *able*, mark you, when you want, to enter into the region of Rest, and to dismiss or command your Thoughts—is a condition of Health; it is a condition of all Power and Energy. For all health, whether

¹ *Towards Democracy*, p. 373.

of mind or body, resides in one's relation to the central Life within. If one cannot get into touch with *that*, then the life-forces cannot flow down into the organism. Most, perhaps all, disease arises from the disturbance of this connexion. All mere hurry, all mere running after external things (as of the man after the water-streams on the mountain-top), inevitably breaks it. Let a pond be allowed calmly under the influence of frost to crystallise, and most beautiful flowers and spears of ice will be formed; but keep stirring the water all the time with a stick or a pole and nothing will result but an ugly brash of half-frozen stuff. The condition of the exercise of power and energy is that it should proceed from a centre of Rest within one. So convinced am I of this, that whenever I find myself hurrying over my work, I pause and say, "Now you are not producing anything good!" and I generally find that that is true. It is curious, but I think very noticeable, that the places where people hurry most—as for instance the City of London or Wall Street, New York—are just the places where the work being done is of *least* importance (being mostly money-gambling); whereas if you go and look at a ploughman ploughing—doing perhaps the most important of human work—you find all his movements most deliberate and leisurely, as if indeed he had infinite time at command; the truth being that in dealing (like a ploughman) with the earth and the horses and the weather and the things of Nature generally you can no more hurry than Nature herself hurries.

Following this line of thought it might seem that one would arrive at a hopeless paradox. If it be true that the less one hurries the better the work resulting, then it might seem that by sitting still and merely twirling one's thumbs one would arrive at the very greatest activity and efficiency! And indeed (if understood aright) there is a truth even in this, which—like the other points I have mentioned—has been known and taught long ages ago. Says that humorous old sage, Lao-tze, whom I have already quoted: "By non-action there is nothing that cannot be done." At first this sounds like mere foolery or worse; but afterwards thinking on it one sees there is a meaning hidden. There is a secret by which Nature and the powers of the universal life will do all for you. The Bhágavat Gita also says, "He who discovers inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among mortals."

It is worth while dwelling for a moment on these texts. We are all—as I said earlier on—involved in work belonging to

12 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

our place and station ; we are tied to some degree in the bonds of action. But that fact need not imprison our inner minds. While acting even with keenness and energy along the external and necessary path before us, it is perfectly possible to hold the mind free and untied—so that the *result* of our action (which of course is not ours to command) shall remain indifferent and incapable of unduly affecting us. Similarly, when it is our part to remain externally *inactive*, we may discover that underneath this apparent inaction we may be taking part in the currents of a deeper life which are moving on to a definite end, to an end or object which in a sense is ours and in a sense is *not* ours. The lighthouse beam flies over land and sea with incredible velocity, and you think the light itself must be in swiftest movement ; but when you climb up thither you find the lamp absolutely stationary. It is only the reflection that is moving. The rider on horseback may gallop to and fro wherever he will, but it is hard to say that *he* is acting. The horse guided by the slightest indication of the man's will performs all the action that is needed. If we can get into right touch with the immense, the incalculable powers of Nature, is there anything which we may not be able to do ? " If a man worship the Self only as his true state," says the Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad, " his work cannot fail, for whatever he desires, that he obtains from the Self." What a wonderful saying, and how infallibly true ! For obviously if you succeed in identifying your true being with the great Self of the universe, then whatever you desire the great Self will also desire, and therefore every power of Nature will be at your service and will conspire to fulfil your need.

There are marvelous things here " well wrapped up "—difficult to describe, yet not impossible to experience. And they all depend upon that power of stilling Thought, that ability to pass unharmed and undismayed through the grinning legions of the lower mind into the very heart of Paradise.

The question inevitably arises, How can this power be obtained ? And there is only one answer—the same answer which has to be given for the attainment of *any* power or faculty. There is no royal road. The only way is (however imperfectly) to *do* the thing in question, to practise it. If you would learn to play cricket, the only way is to play cricket ; if you would be able to speak a language, the only way is to speak it. If you would learn to swim, the only way is to practise swimming. Or would you wish to be like the man who when

his companions were bathing and bidding him come and join them, said : " Yes, I am longing to join you, but I am not going to be such a fool as to go into the water *till I know how to swim !* "

There is nothing but practice. If you want to obtain that priceless power of commanding Thought—of using it or dismissing it (for the two things go together) at will—there is no way but practice. And the practice consists in two exercises : (a) that of concentration—in holding the thought steadily for a time on one subject, or point of a subject ; and (b) that of effacement—in effacing any given thought from the mind, and determining *not* to entertain it for such and such a time. Both these exercises are difficult. Failure in practising them is certain—and may even extend over years. But the power equally certainly grows *with* practice. And ultimately there may come a time when the learner is not only able to efface from his mind any given thought (however importunate), but may even succeed in effacing, during short periods, *all* thought of any kind. When this stage is reached, the veil of illusion which surrounds all mortal things is pierced, and the entrance to the Paradise of Rest (and of universal power and knowledge) is found.

Of indirect or auxiliary methods of reaching this great conclusion, there are more than one. I think a life in the open air, if not absolutely necessary, at least most important. The gods—though sometimes out of compassion they visit the interiors of houses—are not fond of such places and the evil effluvium they find there, and avoid them as much as they can. It is not merely a question of breathing oxygen instead of carbonic acid. There is a presence and an influence in Nature and the Open which expands the mind and causes brigand cares and worries to drop off—whereas in confined places foolish and futile thoughts of all kinds swarm like microbes and cloud and conceal the soul. *Experto Crede*. It is only necessary to try this experiment in order to prove its truth.

Another thing which corresponds in some degree to living physically in the open air, is the living mentally and emotionally in the atmosphere of love. A large charity of mind, which refuses absolutely to shut itself in little secluded places of prejudice, bigotry and contempt for others, and which attains to a great and universal sympathy, helps, most obviously, to open the way to that region of calm and freedom of which we have spoken, while conversely all petty enmity, meanness and

14 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

spite, conspire to imprison the soul and make its deliverance more difficult.

It is not necessary to labour these points. As we said, the way to attain is to sincerely *try* to attain, to consistently *practise* attainment. Whoever does this will find that the way will open out by degrees, as of one emerging from a vast and gloomy forest, till out of darkness the path becomes clear. For whomsoever really *tries* there is no failure; for every effort in that region *is* success, and every onward push, however small, and however little result it may show, is really a move forward, and one step nearer the light.

II

THE NATURE OF THE SELF

THE true nature of the Self is a matter by no means easy to compass. We have all probably at some time or other attempted to fathom the depths of personality, and been baffled. Some people say they can quite distinctly remember a moment in early childhood, about the age of *three* (though the exact period is of course only approximate) when self-consciousness—the awareness of being a little separate Self—first dawned in the mind. It was generally at some moment of childish tension—alone perhaps in a garden, or lost from the mother's protecting hand—that this happened; and it was the beginning of a whole range of new experience. Before some such period there is in childhood strictly speaking no distinct self-consciousness. As Tennyson says (*In Memoriam* xlv):

The baby new to earth and sky,
What time his tender palm is prest
Against the circle of the breast,
Hath never thought that "This is I."

It has consciousness truly, but no distinctive self-consciousness. It is this absence or deficiency which explains many things which at first sight seem obscure in the psychology of children and of animals. The baby (it has often been noticed) experiences little or no sense of *fear*. It does not *know* enough to be afraid; it has never formed any image of itself, as of a thing which might be injured. It may shrink from actual pain or discomfort, but it does not *look forward*—which is of the essence of fear—to pain in the future. Fear and self-consciousness are closely interlinked. Similarly with animals, we often wonder how a horse or a cow can endure to stand out in a field all night,

16 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

exposed to cold and rain, in the lethargic patient way that they exhibit. It is not that they do not *feel* the discomfort, but it is that they do not envisage *themselves* as enduring this pain and suffering for all those coming hours ; and as we know with ourselves that nine-tenths of our miseries really consist in looking forward to future miseries, so we understand that the absence or at any rate slight prevalence of self-consciousness in animals enables them to endure forms of distress which would drive us mad.

In time then the babe arrives at self-consciousness ; and, as one might expect, the growing boy or girl often becomes intensely aware of Self. His or her self-consciousness is crude, no doubt, but it has very little misgiving. If the question of the nature of the Self is propounded to the boy as a problem he has no difficulty in solving it. He says " I know well enough who *I* am : I am the boy with red hair what gave Jimmy Brown such a jolly good licking last Monday week." He knows well enough—or thinks he knows—who he is. And at a later age, though his definition may change and he may describe himself chiefly as a good cricketer or successful in certain examinations, his method is practically the same. He fixes his mind on a certain bundle of qualities and capacities which he is supposed to possess, and calls that bundle Himself. And in a more elaborate way we most of us, I imagine, do the same.

Presently, however, with more careful thought, we begin to see difficulties in this view. I see that directly I think of myself as a certain bundle of qualities—and for that matter it is of no account whether the qualities are good or bad, or in what sort of charming confusion they are mixed—I see at once that I am merely looking *at* a bundle of qualities : and that the real " I," the Self, is not that bundle, but is the being *inspecting* the same—something beyond and behind, as it were. So I now concentrate my thoughts upon that inner Something, in order to find out what it really is. I imagine perhaps an inner being, of ' astral ' or ethereal nature, and possessing a new range of much finer and more subtle qualities than the body—a being inhabiting the body and perceiving through its senses, but quite capable of surviving the tenement in which it dwells—and I think of that as the Self. But no sooner have I taken this step than I perceive that I am committing the same mistake as before. I am only contemplating a new image or picture, and " I " still remain beyond and behind that which I contemplate. No sooner do I turn my attention on the subjective

being than it becomes *objective*, and the real subject retires into the background. And so on indefinitely. I am baffled ; and unable to say positively what the Self is.

Meanwhile there are people who look upon the foregoing speculations about an interior Self as merely unpractical. Being perhaps of a more materialistic type of mind they fix their attention on the body. Frankly they try to define the Self by the body and all that is connected therewith—that is by the mental as well as corporeal qualities which exhibit themselves in that connexion ; and they say, “ At any rate the Self—whatever it may be—is in some way limited by the body ; each person studies the interest of his body and of the feelings, emotions and mentality directly associated with it, and you cannot get beyond that ; it isn’t in human nature to do so. The Self is limited by this corporeal phenomenon and doubtless it perishes when the body perishes.” But here again the conclusion, though specious at first, soon appears to be quite inadequate. For though it is possibly true that a man, if left alone in a Robinson Crusoe life on a desert island, might ultimately subside into a mere gratification of his corporeal needs and of those mental needs which were directly concerned with the body, yet we know that such a case would by no means be representative. On the contrary we know that vast numbers of people spend their lives in considering *other* people, and often so far as to sacrifice their own bodily and mental comfort and well-being. The mother spends her life thinking almost day and night about her babe and the other children—spending all her thoughts and efforts on them. You may call her selfish if you will, but her selfishness clearly extends beyond her personal body and mind, and extends to the personalities of her children around her ; her “ body ”—if you insist on your definition—must be held to include the bodies of all her children. And again, the husband who is toiling for the support of the family, he is thinking and working and toiling and suffering for a ‘ self ’ which includes his wife and children. Do you mean that the whole family is his “ body ” ? Or a man belongs to some society, to a church or to a social league of some kind, and his activities are largely ruled by the interests of this larger group. Or he sacrifices his life—as many have been doing of late—with extraordinary bravery and heroism for the sake of the nation to which he belongs. Must we say then that the whole nation is really a part of the man’s body ? Or again, he gives his life and goes to the stake for his religion. Whether

18 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

his religion is right or wrong does not matter, the point is that there is that in him which can carry him far beyond his local self and the ordinary instincts of his physical organism, to dedicate his life and powers to a something of far wider circumference and scope.

Thus in the *first* of these two examples of a search for the nature of the Self we are led *inwards* from point to point, into interior and ever subtler regions of our being, and still in the end are baffled ; while in the *second* we are carried *outwards* into an ever wider and wider circumference in our quest of the Ego, and still feel that we have failed to reach its ultimate nature. We are driven in fact by these two arguments to the conclusion that that which we are seeking is indeed something very vast—something far extending around, yet also buried deep in the hidden recesses of our minds. How far, how deep, we do not know. We can only say that as far as the indications point the true self is profounder and more far-reaching than anything we have yet fathomed.

In the ordinary commonplace life we shrink to ordinary commonplace selves, but it is one of the blessings of great experiences, even though they are tragic or painful, that they throw us out into that enormously greater self to which we belong. Sometimes, in moments of inspiration, of intense enthusiasm, of revelation, such as a man feels in the midst of a battle, in moments of love and dedication to another person, and in moments of religious ecstasy, an immense world is opened up to the astonished gaze of the inner man, who sees disclosed a self stretched far beyond anything he had ever imagined. We have all had experiences more or less of that kind. I have known quite a few people, and most of you have known some, who at some time, even if only once in their lives, have experienced such an extraordinary lifting of the veil, an opening out of the back of their minds as it were, and have had such a vision of the world, that they have never afterwards forgotten it. They have seen into the heart of creation, and have perceived their union with the rest of mankind. They have had glimpses of a strange immortality belonging to them, a glimpse of their belonging to a far greater being than they have ever imagined. Just once—and a man has never forgotten it, and even if it has not recurred it has coloured all the rest of his life.

Now, this subject has been thought about—since the beginning of the world, I was going to say—but it has been thought

about since the beginnings of history. Some three thousand years ago certain groups of—I hardly like to call them philosophers—but, let us say, people who were meditating and thinking upon these problems, were in the habit of locating themselves in the forests of Northern India; and schools arose there. In the case of each school some teacher went into the woods and collected groups of disciples around him, who lived there in his company and listened to his words. Such schools were formed in very considerable numbers, and the doctrines of these teachers were gathered together, generally by their disciples, in notes, which notes were brought together into little pamphlets or tracts, forming the books which are called the 'Upanishads' of the Indian sages. They contain some extraordinary words of wisdom, some of which I want to bring before you. The conclusions arrived at were not so much what we should call philosophy in the modern sense. They were not so much the result of the analysis of the mind and the following out of concatenations of strict argument; but they were flashes of intuition and experience, and all through the 'Upanishads' you find these extraordinary flashes embedded in the midst of a great deal of what we should call a rather rubbishy kind of argument, and a good deal of merely conventional Brahmanical talk of those days. But the people who wrote and spoke thus had an intuition into the heart of things which I make bold to say very few people in modern life have. These 'Upanishads,' however various their subjects, practically agree on one point—in the definition of the "self." They agree in saying that the self of each man is continuous with and in a sense identical with the Self of the universe. Now that seems an extraordinary conclusion, and one which almost staggers the modern mind to conceive of. But that is the conclusion, that is the thread which runs all through the 'Upanishads'—the identity of the self of each individual with the self of every other individual throughout mankind, and even with the selves of the animals and other creatures.

Those who have read the Khandogya Upanishad remember how in that treatise the father instructs his son Svetaketu on this very subject—pointing him out in succession the objects of Nature and on each occasion exhorting him to realise his identity with the very essence of the object—" *Tat twam asi, That thou art.*" He calls Svetaketu's attention to a tree. What is the *essence* of the tree? When they have rejected the external characteristics—the leaves, the branches, etc.—and agreed

20 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

that the *sap* is the essence, then the father says, "*Tat twam asi*—*That thou art.*" He gives his son a crystal of salt, and asks him what is the essence of that. The son is puzzled. Clearly neither the form nor the transparent quality are essential. The father says, "Put the crystal in water." Then when it is melted he says, "Where is the crystal?" The son replies, "I do not know." "Dip your finger in the bowl," says the father, "and taste." Then Svetaketu dips here and there, and everywhere there is a salt flavour. They agree that *that* is the essence of salt; and the father says again, "*Tat twam asi.*" I am of course neither defending nor criticising the scientific attitude here adopted. I am only pointing out that this psychological identification of the observer with the object observed runs through the Upanishads, and is I think worthy of the deepest consideration.

In the 'Bhágavat Gita,' which is a later book, the author speaks of "him whose soul is purified, whose self is the Self of all creatures." A phrase like that challenges opposition. It is so bold, so sweeping, and so immense, that we hesitate to give our adhesion to what it implies. But what does it mean—"whose soul is purified"? I believe that it means this, that with most of us our souls are anything but clean or purified, they are by no means transparent, so that all the time we are continually deceiving ourselves and making clouds between us and others. We are all the time grasping things from other people, and if not in words, are mentally boasting ourselves against others, trying to think of our own superiority to the rest of the people around us. Sometimes we try to run our neighbours down a little, just to show that they are not quite equal to our level. We try to snatch from others some things which belong to them, or take credit to ourselves for things to which we are not fairly entitled. But all the time we are acting so it is perfectly obvious that we are weaving veils between ourselves and others. You cannot have dealings with another person in a purely truthful way, and be continually trying to cheat that person out of money, or out of his good name and reputation. If you are doing that, however much in the background you may be doing it, you are not looking the person fairly in the face—there is a cloud between you all the time. So long as your soul is not purified from all these really absurd and ridiculous little desires and superiorities and self-satisfactions, which make up so much of our lives, just so long as that happens you do not and you cannot see the

truth. But when it happens to a person, as it does happen in times of great and deep and bitter experience; when it happens that all these trumpery little objects of life are swept away; then occasionally, with astonishment, the soul sees that It is also the soul of the others around. Even if it does not become aware of an absolute identity, it perceives that there is a deep relationship and communion between itself and others, and it comes to understand how it may really be true that to him whose soul is purified the self is literally the Self of all creatures.

Ordinary men and those who go on more intellectual and less intuitional lines will say that these ideas are really contrary to human nature and to nature generally. Yet I think that those people who say this in the name of Science are extremely unscientific, because a very superficial glance at nature reveals that the very same thing is taking place throughout nature. Consider the madrepoes, corallines, or sponges. You find, for instance, that constantly the little self of the coralline or sponge is functioning at the end of a stem and casting forth its tentacles into the water to gain food and to breathe the air out of the water. That little animalcule there, which is living in that way, imagines no doubt that it is working all for itself, and yet it is united down the stem at whose extremity it stands, with the life of the whole madrepore or sponge to which it belongs. There is the common life of the whole and the individual life of each, and while the little creature at the end of the stem is thinking (if it is conscious at all) that its whole energies are absorbed in its own maintenance, it really is feeding the common life through the stem to which it belongs, and in its turn it is being fed by that common life.

You have only to look at an ordinary tree to see the same thing going on. Each little leaf on a tree may very naturally have sufficient consciousness to believe that it is an entirely separate being maintaining itself in the sunlight and the air, withering away and dying when the winter comes on—and there is an end of it. It probably does not realise that all the time it is being supported by the sap which flows from the trunk of the tree, and that in its turn it is feeding the tree, too—that its self is the self of the whole tree. If the leaf could really understand itself, it would see that its self was deeply, intimately connected, practically one with the life of the whole tree. Therefore, I say that this Indian view is not unscientific. On the contrary, I am sure that it is thoroughly scientific.

22 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

Let us take another passage, out of the 'Svetasvatara Upanishad,' which, speaking of the self says: "He is the one God, hidden in all creatures, all pervading, the self within all, watching over all works, shadowing all creatures, the witness, the perceiver, the only one free from qualities."

And now we can return to the point where we left the argument at the beginning of this discourse. We said, you remember, that the Self is certainly no mere bundle of qualities—that the very nature of the mind forbids us thinking that. For however fine and subtle any quality or group of qualities may be, we are irresistibly compelled by the nature of the mind itself to look for the Self, not in any quality or qualities, but in the being that *perceives* those qualities. The passage I have just quoted says that being is "The one God, hidden in all creatures, all pervading, the self within all . . . the witness, the perceiver, the only one free from qualities." And the more you think about it the clearer I think you will see that this passage is correct—that there can be only *one* witness, *one* perceiver, and that is the one God hidden in all creatures, "Sarva Sakshi," the Universal Witness.

Have you ever had that curious feeling, not uncommon, especially in moments of vivid experience and emotion, that there was at the back of your mind a witness, watching everything that was going on, yet too deep for your ordinary thought to grasp? Has it not occurred to you—in a moment say of great danger when the mind was agitated to the last degree by fears and anxieties—suddenly to become perfectly calm and collected, to realise that *nothing* can harm you, that you are identified with some great and universal being lifted far over this mortal world and unaffected by its storms? Is it not obvious that the real Self *must* be something of this nature, a being perceiving all, but itself remaining unperceived? For indeed if it were perceived it would fall under the head of some definable quality, and so becoming the object of thought would cease to be the subject, would cease to be the Self.

The witness is and must be "free from qualities." For since it is capable of perceiving *all* qualities it must obviously not be itself imprisoned or tied in any quality—it must either be entirely without quality, or if it have the potentiality of quality in it, it must have the potentiality of *every* quality; but in either case it cannot be in bondage to any quality, and in either case it would appear that there can be only *one* such ultimate Witness in the universe. For if

10293

there were two or more such Witnesses, then we should be compelled to suppose them distinguished from one another by something, and that something could only be a difference of qualities, which would be contrary to our conclusion that such a Witness cannot be in bondage to any quality.

There is then I take it—as the text in question says—only one Witness, one Self, throughout the universe. It is hidden in all living things, men and animals and plants; it pervades all creation. In every thing that has consciousness it is the Self; it watches over all operations, it overshadows all creatures, it moves in the depths of our hearts, the perceiver, the only being that is cognisant of all and yet free from all.

Once you really appropriate this truth, and assimilate it in the depths of your mind, a vast change (you can easily imagine) will take place within you. The whole world will be transformed, and every thought and act of which you are capable will take on a different colour and complexion. Indeed the revolution will be so vast that it would be quite impossible for me within the limits of this discourse to describe it. I will however, occupy the rest of my time in dealing with some points and conclusions, and some mental changes which will flow perfectly naturally from this axiomatic change taking place at the very root of life.

“Free from qualities.” We generally pride ourselves a little on our qualities. Some of us think a great deal of our good qualities, and some of us are rather ashamed of our bad ones! I would say: “Do not trouble very much about all that. What good qualities you have—well you may be quite sure they do not really amount to much; and what bad qualities, you may be sure they are not very important! Do not make too much fuss about either. Do you see? The thing is that *you*, you yourself, are not *any* of your qualities—you are the being that perceives them. The thing to see to is that they should not confuse you, bamboozle you, and hide you from the knowledge of yourself—that they should not be erected into a screen, to hide you from others, or the others from you. If you cease from running after qualities, then after a little time your soul will become purified, and you will *know* that your self is the Self of all creatures; and when you can feel that you will know that the other things do not much matter.

Sometimes people are so awfully good that their very good-

24 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

ness hides them from other people. They really cannot be on a level with others, and they feel that the others are far below them. Consequently their 'selves' are blinded or hidden by their 'goodness.' It is a sad end to come to! And sometimes it happens that very 'bad' people—just because they are so bad—do not erect any screens or veils between themselves and others. Indeed they are only too glad if others will recognise them, or if they may be allowed to recognise others. And so, after all, they come nearer the truth than the very good people.

"The Self is free from qualities." That thing which is so deep, which belongs to all, it either—as I have already said—has *all* qualities, or it has none. You, to whom I am speaking now, your qualities, good and bad, are all mine. I am perfectly willing to accept them. They are all right enough and in place—if one can only find the places for them. But I know that in most cases they have got so confused and mixed up that they cause great conflict and pain in the souls that harbour them. If you attain to knowing yourself to be other than and separate from the qualities, then you will pass below and beyond them all. You will be able to accept *all* your qualities and harmonise them, and your soul will be at peace. You will be free from the domination of qualities then because you will know that among all the multitudes of them there are none of any importance!

If you should happen some day to reach that state of mind in connexion with which this revelation comes, then you will find the experience a most extraordinary one. You will become conscious that there is no barrier in your path; that the way is open in all directions; that all men and women belong to you, are part of you. You will feel that there is a great open immense world around, which you had never suspected before, which belongs to you, and the riches of which are all yours, waiting for you. It may, of course, take centuries and thousands of years to realise this thoroughly, but there it is. You are just at the threshold, peeping in at the door. What did Shakespeare say? "To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou can'st not then be false to any man." What a profound bit of philosophy in three lines! I doubt if anywhere the basis of all human life has been expressed more perfectly and tersely.

One of the Upanishads (the Maitráyana-Brahmana) says: "The happiness belonging to a mind, which through deep

inwardness¹ (or understanding) has been washed clean and has entered into the Self, is a thing beyond the power of words to describe: it can only be perceived by an inner faculty." Observe the conviction, the intensity with which this joy, this happiness is described, which comes to those whose minds have been washed clean (from all the silly trumpery sediment of self-thought) and have become transparent, so that the great universal Being residing there in the depths can be perceived. What sorrow indeed, what grief, can come to such an one who has seen this vision? It is truly a thing beyond the power of words to describe: it can only be *perceived*—and that by an inner faculty. The external apparatus of thought is of no use. Argument is of no use. But experience and direct perception are possible; and probably all the experiences of life and of mankind through the ages are gradually deepening our powers of perception to that point where the vision will at last rise upon the inward eye.

Another text, from the Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad (which I have already quoted in the paper on "Rest"), says: "If a man worship the Self only as his true state, his work cannot fail, for whatever he desires, that he obtains from the Self." Is that not magnificent? If you truly realise your identity and union with the great Self who inspires and informs the world, then obviously whatever you desire the great Self will desire, and the whole world will conspire to bring it to you. "He maketh the winds his angels, and the flaming fires his ministers." [I need not say that I am not asking you to try and identify yourself with the great Self universal *in order* to get riches, "opulence," and other things of that kind which you desire; because in that quest you will probably not succeed. The Great Self is not such a fool as to be taken in in that way. It may be true—and it *is* true—that if ye seek *first* the Kingdom of Heaven all these things shall be added unto you; but you must seek it first, not second.]

¹ The word in the Max Müller translation is "meditation." But that is, I think, a somewhat misleading word. It suggests to most people the turning inward of the *thinking* faculty to grope and delve in the interior of the mind. This is just what should *not* be done. Meditation in the proper sense should mean the inward deepening of *feeling* and consciousness till the region of the universal self is reached; but *thought* should not interfere there. That should be turned on outward things to mould them into *expression* of the inner consciousness.

26 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

Here is a passage from *Towards Democracy* : " As space spreads everywhere, and all things move and change within it, but it moves not nor changes,

" So I am the space within the soul, of which the space without is but the similitude and mental image ;

" Comest thou to inhabit me, thou hast the entrance to all life—death shall no longer divide thee from whom thou lovest.

" I am the Sun that shines upon all creatures from within—gazest thou upon me, thou shalt be filled with joy eternal."

Yes, this great sun is there, always shining, but most of the time it is hidden from us by the clouds of which I have spoken, and we fail to see it. We complain of being out in the cold ; and in the cold, for the time being, no doubt we are ; but our return to the warmth and the light has now become possible.

Thus at last the Ego, the mortal immortal self—disclosed at first in darkness and fear and ignorance in the growing babe—*finds its true identity*. For a long period it is baffled in trying to understand what it is. It goes through a vast experience. It is tormented by the sense of separation and alienation—alienation from other people, and persecution by all the great powers and forces of the universe ; and it is pursued by a sense of its own doom. Its doom truly is irrevocable. The hour of fulfilment approaches, the veil lifts, and the soul beholds at last *its own true being*.

We are accustomed to think of the external world around us as a nasty tiresome old thing of which all we can say for certain is that it works by a "law of cussedness"—so that, whichever way we want to go, that way seems always barred, and we only bump against blind walls without making any progress. But that uncomfortable state of affairs arises from ourselves. Once we have passed a certain barrier, which at present looks so frowning and impossible, but which fades into nothing immediately we have passed it—once we have found the open secret of identity—then the way is indeed open in every direction.

The world in which we live—the world into which we are tumbled as children at the first onset of self-consciousness—denies this great fact of unity. It is a world in which the principle of separation rules. Instead of a common life and union with each other, the contrary principle (especially in the

later civilisations) has been the one recognised—and to such an extent that always there prevails the obsession of separation, and the conviction that each person is an isolated unit. The whole of our modern society has been founded on this delusive idea, *which is false*. You go into the markets, and every man's hand is against the others—that is the ruling principle. You go into the Law Courts where justice is, or should be, administered, and you find that the principle which denies unity is the one that prevails. The criminal (whose actions have really been determined by the society around him) is cast out, disacknowledged, and condemned to further isolation in a prison cell. 'Property' again is the principle which rules and determines our modern civilisation—namely that which is proper to, or can be appropriated by, each person, as *against* the others. In the moral world the doom of separation comes to us in the shape of the sense of sin. For sin is separation. Sin is actually (and that is its only real meaning) the separation from others, and the non-acknowledgment of unity. And so it has come about that during all this civilisation-period the sense of sin has ruled and ranged to such an extraordinary degree. Society has been built on a false base, not true to fact or life—and has had a dim uneasy consciousness of its falseness. Meanwhile at the heart of it all—and within all the frantic external strife and warfare—there is all the time this real great life brooding. The Kingdom of Heaven, as we said before, is still within.

The word Democracy indicates something of the kind—the rule of the Demos, that is of the common life. The coming of that will transform, not only our Markets and our Law Courts and our sense of Property, and other institutions, into something really great and glorious instead of the dismal masses of rubbish which they at present are; but it will transform our sense of Morality.

Our Morality at present consists in the idea of self-goodness—one of the most pernicious and disgusting ideas which has ever infested the human brain. If any one should follow and assimilate what I have just said about the true nature of the Self he will realise that it will never again be possible for him to congratulate himself on his own goodness or morality or superiority; for the moment he does so he will separate himself from the universal life, and proclaim the sin of his own separation. I agree that this conclusion is for some people a most sad and disheartening one—but it cannot be helped! A man may truly be 'good' and 'moral' in some real sense;

28 THE TEACHING OF THE UPANISHADS

but only on the condition that he is not aware of it. He can only *be* good when not thinking about the matter ; to be *conscious* of one's own goodness is already to have fallen !

We began by thinking of the self as just a little local self ; then we extended it to the family, the cause, the nation—ever to a larger and vaster being. At last there comes a time when we recognise—or see that we *shall* have to recognise—an inner Equality between ourselves and all others ; not of course an external equality—for that would be absurd and impossible—but an inner and profound and universal Equality. And so we come again to the mystic root-conception of Democracy.

And now it will be said : “ But after all this talk you have not defined the Self, or given us any intellectual outline of what you mean by the word.” No—and I do not intend to. If I could, by any sort of copybook definition, describe and show the boundaries of myself, I should obviously lose all interest in the subject. Nothing more dull could be imagined. I may be able to define and describe fairly exhaustively this inkpot on the table ; but for you or for me to give the limits and boundaries of ourselves is, I am glad to say, impossible. That does not, however, mean that we cannot *feel* and be *conscious* of ourselves, and of our relations to other selves, and to the great Whole. On the contrary I think it is clear that the more vividly we feel our organic unity with the whole, the less shall we be able to separate off the local self and enclose it within any definition. I take it that we can and do become ever more vividly conscious of our true Self, but that the mental statement of it always does and probably always will lie beyond us. All life and all our action and experience consist in the gradual manifestation of that which is within us—of our inner being. In that sense—and reading its handwriting on the outer world—we come to know the soul's true nature more and more intimately ; we enter into the mind of that great artist who beholds himself in his own creation.

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